

## *“The Flask”*

December 2008

Hymn “Creating God we give you thanks... VU 292

Scripture Luke 7:36-50

Verse 40: Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.”  
“Tell me, teacher,” he said

Prayer Let us pray – Maker of all things, loving parent to all mankind, startle us with your truth and goodness this day. Open our minds and our imaginations to the working of your spirit in us that we may receive you and one another with joy and fellowship, through Jesus our Guide. Amen.

Lesson This passage is a model of story-telling which contains the Christian faith in capsule form. If all the rest of the gospels were lost and this preserved we would have the good news – the gospel.

We have three figures on the stage. Jesus pairs off with Simon the Pharisee, Simon pairs off with “the woman” and “the woman” pairs off with Jesus and we learn from each encounter. Simon can be compared with a ‘door slammed’, “the woman” with a ‘flask broken’, and Jesus with a ‘hand extended’.

From the start of his ministry Jesus gathered people into a family. So had the Pharisees. For Jesus the family was **inclusive** – “Whosoever will – let them come.” The Pharisees were **exclusive**. Simon knew about “this kind of woman” – not one of “our kind”. Jesus knew that poor Simon could not see the woman. He could only see his own labels – she is a sinner, a hippie, a radical. I don’t know her parents; she’s not from around here. She doesn’t belong. Simon was a door-slammer.

There is a difference between a church and a secular club. Private secular clubs have every right to limit membership, to set the standards they wish. But the church is God’s family on earth and every human creature is a part of that family by birth. The church is a gathering place for those who acknowledge themselves a part of that family. God made the church to be home for all his children. Jesus was a door opener.

“The woman” was invited by Jesus to come through ‘the door’. Once through she showed extravagant generosity in using her greatest material possession, the ointment from her flask, to bathe Jesus feet. Jesus was drawn to her because this was so much like what he would do. He valued reckless generosity. The flask – the beautifully, extravagant, spontaneous act of self-giving.

Jesus loved them both. He loves the Simons just as he loves the great giver. But the flask broken is the symbol for all time of love outpoured. Yet the hand of Jesus, extended to lift a “sinner” is a more powerful symbol yet. “The woman” was capable of love. Jesus was the source of love. That hand – reaching – made her love complete. Anne Murray sings of it in, “You needed me,” with one line, “you gave me dignity”. May those who come seeking find it in our churches and in our AOTS clubs.

*Based on material from “a present help” by Robert A Wallace*

**Discussion** Discuss the relationship between Jesus and Simon.

Discuss the “openness” of your AOTS club. Are there “outsiders”?

**Prayer** Let us pray – Blessed are you, O God, our creator, that you have given us life itself, this world in which to live, new life in Christ, and life everlasting in your glory. As we look to our life together in this season of Advent and Christmas and the year that stretches ahead of us, we seek direction from your spirit. Grant us sensitivity to the needs of those around us. May we not look on the world’s pain with dry eyes. Grant us wisdom to choose new ways of service, courage to walk in those ways and the constant challenge of your spirit to teach out to others in loving acceptance. Through Jesus, our guide. Amen..

**Coming events** See [www.aots.ca](http://www.aots.ca) coming events section

**Book of the month** **The gospel according to Luke.**

Hymn

“Infant Holy, Infant Lowly”

VU 58

Scripture           The birth of Jesus took place like this. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. Before they came to the marriage bed, Joseph discovered she was pregnant. Joseph, chagrined but noble, determined to take care of things quietly so Mary would not be disgraced.

While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God’s angel spoke in the dream: “Joseph, son of David, don’t hesitate to get married. Mary’s pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God’s Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus – ‘God saves’- because he will save his people from their sins.” This would bring the prophet’s embryonic sermon to full term:

    Watch for this – a virgin will get pregnant and bear a son;

    They will name him Immanuel (Hebrew for “God is with us”)

Then Joseph woke up. He did exactly what God’s angel commanded in the dream: He married Mary. But he did not consummate the marriage until she had the baby. He named the baby Jesus.

*Matthew 1: 18-25 (The Message)*

Prayer

    Let us pray – God of stable, stars, and surprises, of light and hope and new life, open our eyes and hearts to your presence in our world, forgive our obsession with property and possessions, forgive our compromises and narrowness of vision. Open us to your grace, that we might hear again the song of the angels, and respond with a song in our hearts, and in our lives. Amen

VU 63

Lesson

    In preparing this devotion I looked for a hymn which mentions Joseph, I didn’t find one. Joseph is usually in the shadows of any manger scene. The earthly “father” of Jesus is always a minor figure. Joseph is something of a mystery.

    What do we know of Joseph? When we first meet him he is betrothed to Mary, which means they had an engagement which could not be broken except by divorce or death but they had not had a formal wedding. I wonder what Mary told Joseph about her encounter with the angel Gabriel. Joseph could have denied fatherhood publicly, putting Mary to shame and divorcing her. But instead they kept the pregnancy to themselves. In doing so, Joseph put his own reputation as a devout man at risk. Then he experienced his strange dream. The fact Joseph took it seriously indicates his sensitivity to the Spirit.

    What else do we know about the character of Joseph? Since he was a carpenter, and probably poorly paid, we know he was poor. But we also know he was proud, so he was poor only in goods. In fact, the experience of the Holy Family leading up to Jesus’ birth raises questions about where true wealth lies. Much later when Jesus would talk of persons who were “the salt of the earth” can there be any doubt that Joseph appeared in his mind.

    We learn that Joseph was adventurous. It is hard to imagine what it meant to take a family from Israel to Egypt at that time in history. He undertook a perilous journey under dangerous conditions. Here we note the incredible capacity of the human spirit to

expand to meet the needs of the time. Later, Jesus, in summoning his followers to adventure, knew he had lived with a good example of this in his home.

Joseph appears to have been a strict observer of the law of God while at the same time having sympathy. He was a just man, combining rules and compassion – not a common blend. He also appears to have been a generous man. There were several children in the family, of which Jesus was the eldest. As an indication of Joseph's influence on Jesus, there are many compassionate, generous fathers in Jesus' parables.

Finally there is Joseph's sensitivity to the leading of the Spirit. Dreams are one way God has of getting us to deal with our life work, unfinished business, or business that we must begin. There is much talk in Advent of keeping the Christmas spirit alive all year long. That may be too much to hope for. What we can keep fresh is our alertness to the Spirit's bidding. Following the example of Joseph, we can burnish our receptors – attention and expectation.

*Based on material from "a time to gather" by Robert A Wallace*

**Discussion** Discuss fatherhood from the example of Joseph. Talk about examples of fathers in your life, yourself, your sons, your father, your grandfathers.

**Prayer** Let us pray – At this time, O God, help us to understand fatherhood. As AOTS men may we be good examples for others to follow. Make us givers of gifts at Christmas, O Lord. May we not hesitate to share good things that you give, our possessions, our time, our homes, and our friendship. As you have given, so may we. Amen.

## *“Finding Jesus at Christmas time”*

December 2010

### **Hymn**

“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God”

VU356

### **Scripture**

Matthew 7: 6-14 (The Message)

Don't be flip with the sacred. Banter and silliness give no honour to God. Don't reduce holy mysteries to slogans. In trying to be relevant, you're only being cute and inviting sacrilege.

Don't bargain with God. Be direct. Ask for what you need. This isn't a cat-and-mouse, hide-and-seek game we're in. If your child asks for bread, do you trick him with sawdust? If he asks for fish, do you scare him with a live snake on his plate? As bad as you are, you wouldn't think of such a thing. You're at least decent to your own children. So don't you think the God who conceived you in love will be even better?

Here is a simple rule-of-thumb guide to behaviour: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for them. Add up God's law and prophets and this is what you get.

Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with sure-fire, easy-going formulae for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life – to God – is vigorous and requires total attention.

### **Prayer**

Let us pray together – We come seeking the one they call Jesus, the prince of peace. Help us, O God, to open our hearts and minds to receive the message of love that He taught and lived so long ago. Amen

### **Reflection**

In this season which tends to be too busy, where are we looking? We go shopping for gifts for friends and relatives and are almost trampled by other shoppers. We volunteer with the Salvation Army kettles and are given warm smiles, with the occasional frown. The food banks, which seem to constantly need more help and more food, are busy feeding the hungry. The out-of-the-cold programs are bringing in the homeless to a temporary warm place. Our churches are brimming with extra services like carol concerts, white gift presentations, advent candle-lighting, and community dinners. Our hospitals, our retirement homes, our palliative care centres are caring for the sick, the lonely, the dying. Is Jesus in any of these places?

There were wise men looking for the baby that had been born in Bethlehem. He was born to be a king so they searched for him in the palace. He wasn't there. They found him in a stable.

When their eldest son was twelve, Mary and Joseph found he was missing when they were returning from the celebration of Passover. Had Jesus been kidnapped? They returned to Jerusalem to try to find him. Was he playing with some new found friends? They found Jesus in the temple, talking to the priests and elders.

Zaccheus, the tax collector, had to climb a tree to try to see Jesus. He saw him as he was walking by on the road. He saw him even closer when Jesus came to his house to share a meal.

Those who looked for Jesus found him in different places. The fishers found Jesus standing on the lakeshore. Nicodemus found him in his room. The soldiers who came to arrest Jesus found him in the garden of Gethsemane. Mary found him beside the tomb. Two disciples on the way to Emmaus were surprised to find Jesus sharing bread with them.

Jesus could be found by those who were seeking him. If we are seeking in 2010, where will we find him?

May you find Jesus in this advent season as we prepare to celebrate His birth. He is there, waiting to be found.

Discussion    Why are we celebrating? In what way is Jesus part of your celebration?

Closing prayer    Let us pray – We find you, O Christ, in all whom we meet along the way. May we see the light of Christ in each one we meet, and may everyone see the light of Christ in us. Amen.

# Message of Love and Peace

Devotion for December 2014

Hymn: VU 6 A Candle Is Burning

Scripture: Luke 2 1-29

## Reflection:

What else would one talk about in December, but Christmas. By now we all know that there was no Christmas in the new testament, and no Christians either. Theologians pinpoint either March or April as the real time for the birth of Jesus. December 25<sup>th</sup> was chosen sometime in the third century to satisfy the pagan winter solstice celebrations, and the new group known as Christians who believed in the virgin birth. Christmas has a number of tradition, each with its own story, the tree, yule log, candy canes, holly and Christmas cards. Of course Santa, and each of these developed separately and at different times. The most recent tradition of course is SHOPPING. Santa had various costumes and colours over the years but his traditional suit and colours, pretty much accepted worldwide now, can be attributed to a Coke-A- Cola add in the 1930's. For years now most theologians dispute the virgin birth story, and many other stories in the New Testament. Sort of makes one think, doesn't it, if none of that is true why do we believe, why go to church, and perhaps that knowledge, or current thought is why the massive decline in church attendance. Well, we each have our own thoughts, our own rationale for what we do and how we think, but no one can dispute the love, the truth and legacy that Jesus left. Believer or not, what Christmas stands for is a message of love and peace the whole world believes and some day may even practice. Merry Christmas.

Discussion: What does Christmas really mean for you?

Hymn: VU 43 Go Tell It On The Mountain

Prayer: For the gift of Jesus may we always be thankful. Help us Lord to reach that day when the whole world, no matter their belief lives the message of Christmas. amen

## “Christ back in Christmas”

Devotion for December 2016

Hymn: VU.44 It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6 Luke 2: 13-14

Reflection

Some years ago there was a young couple who attended our church. They had two young boys. This couple were very involved in Sunday School and all other church work. It was Christmas time and Paul the father said to me, “sure wish we could put Christ back in Christmas”. He was stunned at my response, “I don’t. He was never there.” Of course we all know according to the experts, Christ was born in March or April and when he was alive and preaching Christmas did not exist. Christmas did not come into existence for centuries after his death and mainly to appease those non-Christians. Christ’s birthday was an added extra to appeal to those believers. Christmas is a great good feeling time of year: be nice to everyone: watch Home Alone and then Jimmy Stewart on TV: make the CR CD companies happy and maybe even go to Midnight Mass, or its equivalent protestant service and pretend that this is really a celebration about the birth of a baby! A special baby.

Discussion;

If we took the shopping equation out of December the 25<sup>th</sup> how many people do you think would really be interested in Christmas? We do all enjoy the hymns though. Something to talk about!

Hymn VU: 43 Go Tell It on the Mountain

Prayer; Well God, it is that time of year again, and you know it does foster good will in most people along with generosity for the poor, the homeless and anyone less fortunate. Contrary to your wishes that generous feeling seems to dissipate within a few days after December 25. Most of us are very thankful for our lives and what we have but I guess what we would ask, wish for and pray is that somehow the Christmas spirit would stick around for the other 364 days of the year. In Jesus name we pray, amen